

Article from the Portsmouth Press Herald concerning the Sarah Mildred Long Bridge Project

Written by Deborah Mcdermott
January 25, 2013

KITTERY, Maine — The design of the new Sarah Mildred Long Bridge is going to strive for a community-driven, "uniquely special" bridge that Seacoast residents will develop alongside the engineers.

That was the message delivered Thursday afternoon by Linda Figg, president and "director of bridge art" of Figg Engineering, who spoke to about 60 members of the Long Bridge stakeholders committee at Kittery Town Hall. Figg Engineering has been selected by the Maine Department of Transportation to design the new bridge.

Figg told the group that her company has received more than 100 awards for bridge design because of its approach to involve the community early on and throughout the design process. And the same approach will be used with the Long Bridge project.

A few themes already emerged on Thursday, such as creating a bridge that harkens to the area's maritime and colonial history and one that uses recycled material as much as possible.

Some parameters have already been decided, said Joyce Taylor, MDOT director of project development. While there will be a bicycle lane, there will be no pedestrian sidewalk. The project can't cost any more than \$170 million. Albacore Park will not be disturbed. It will be a center lift span bridge, as opposed to some other design.

William Rohleder, Figg vice president of project development, said at this early stage, the engineers are considering several sites for the bridge, including one further upriver from the current bridge. The Portsmouth approach for that proposed bridge would be long, and the bridge itself would be perpendicular to the river and not on an angle, as is the case with the current bridge. That would allow for easier passage for vessels and could make the center lift span 270 feet instead of 300 feet long.

Another consideration is a taller bridge than the current one, which would allow most boats to pass underneath without the need to stop traffic and lift the center span. One design and financial consideration is the rail line to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, which runs underneath the current bridge.

"We're looking at rail, but we have to find a way to pay for it," Taylor said. "The shipyard is of vital importance to both states and neither will do anything to put it at risk. The idea is to work with partners to get the cost of the rail section down."

To date, the U.S. Navy has not expressed an interest in contributing to the cost of the bridge.

But Figg said most design elements are still to be determined by this public process. She detailed a number of bridges that her company has built that incorporated elements based on local input. One incorporated art deco design; a Toledo, Ohio, bridge used glass components; and the Penobscot Narrows Bridge in Maine used local granite.

Committee members said they were pleasantly surprised at the process.

"This has been a great meeting. It never dawned on me that you could have a beautiful bridge" to replace the Long Bridge, said Gail Drobnyk of Kittery.

"We're all working together on solutions," said Paul O'Connor, president of the Metal Trades Council at the shipyard. "Putting a local touch on a bridge is an incredible idea."

Stakeholder and public workshops will be held through June, with a final design expected at that time, Figg said.